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Chairman: Mr. Wolfe ..... (Jamaica)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 63: Advancement of Women (A/61/283 and 303)

(a) Advancement of women (A/62/38, 177, 201, 202 and 290)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/62/178)

1. **Ms. Mayanja** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that it had been a positive year for women and for gender equality issues. In March 2007, an informal thematic debate held by the General Assembly, on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment had strengthened consensus that gender equality was both an important goal and an essential precursor to political stability, peace and sustainable development. At its substantive session of 2007, the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council had emphasized the centrality of gender equality to development and poverty eradication, as reflected in its ministerial declaration (E/2007/L.13). The Commission on the Status of Women, for its part, while acknowledging that policies and legal frameworks had been established to protect and promote the rights of the girl child, had noted at its fifty-first session that violence against women and girls continued unabated in every continent, country and culture, with a devastating impact on society as a whole.

2. The year 2007 had seen an increased focus by both Member States and United Nations bodies on implementation of commitments to gender equality as well as further efforts to build the Organization's effectiveness in meeting challenges facing women.

3. In the current biennium, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had been able to hold constructive dialogues with as many as 69 States parties. Responsibility for supporting the Committee would be transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva as of 1 January 2008.

4. Despite achievements on women's issues and progress in the fields of anti-discrimination legislation, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, health, employment, education and political participation, women continued to face major challenges, such as poverty, violence, conflict, marginalization, restrictions in access to resources and exclusion from decision-making. They continued to suffer limited access to credit, land and training in new technologies as well as fewer educational and employment opportunities. Policies and programmes to address the situation must be guided by the acknowledgement that the majority of the world's poor were women and that without reducing women's poverty, overall poverty eradication goals would remain elusive.

5. The High-level Special Session on Climate Change had underscored the threat posed to humanity by deforestation, desertification, greenhouse gases and biofuels. In the 1991 cyclone disasters that had killed 140,000 in Bangladesh, 90 per cent of the victims had been women. Similarly, in the Asian tsunami of 2004, women had accounted for 70 to 80 per cent of all deaths. Women also faced the greatest obstacles in re-establishing their livelihoods in the wake of disasters. Governments, United Nations entities, civil society and the private sector must work together to integrate women's concerns in climate change programmes and policies in line with the Beijing Platform of Action, which called for enhanced participation of women in the management of environmental resources and the reduction of environmental risks to women.

6. General Assembly resolution 61/143 had given unprecedented visibility to the issue of violence against women, highlighting the urgent need for action. Towards the end of 2007, the Secretary-General would be launching a system-wide, multi-year campaign to ensure a consistent and comprehensive response, especially in support of action at the national level. The Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality would play a critical coordinating role.

7 Responses by both Member States and the United Nations system to grave violations of women's human rights in conflict and post-conflict situations remained inadequate, with impunity for sexual and gender-based violence persisting. Moreover, although women often organized at the grass-roots level to promote peace, their access to formal peacemaking and peacebuilding processes remained restricted.

8. Two reviews of the implementation of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on resolution 1325

(2000) held in 2006 and 2007 had revealed that although significant progress had been made in recent years in terms of policy reforms, norm-setting and institutional development, the large gap between policy and practice at the country level must be urgently addressed. A re-conceptualized Plan for 2008-2009 would provide a more focused, results-based programming, reporting and monitoring tool.

9. The Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality was collaborating effectively to develop competencies and methodologies for gender mainstreaming, gender training and budgeting. The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) was increasingly involved in coordinating gender mainstreaming activities. The United Nations system now possessed a common strategy and policy to that end, which included system-wide indicators and standards. However, although consistent efforts were being made by United Nations bodies to incorporate gender perspectives into their substantive work and plans, slow progress in improving the representation of women in the Secretariat remained of serious concern. As of 30 June 2007, women had represented only 37 per cent of professional and higher category appointments of one year or more, representing a decrease of 0.3 per cent since 30 June 2006; only six of 33 Under-Secretaries-General were currently women, and only 11 of 42 Assistant Secretaries-General. The Women Leaders Working Group, meeting in Vienna in May, had called on the Secretary-General to prioritize the establishment of a mechanism to increase the number of women considered for appointment as special representatives and envoys. The Secretary-General was deeply concerned about the underrepresentation of women in senior echelons. Her own Office was currently working with the Deputy Secretary-General and the Department of Management on concrete proposals to remedy the situation. Member States should also use their influence to increase representation of women in intergovernmental bodies and within the United Nations system.

10. In recent informal consultations, Member States had strongly reaffirmed that gender equality was a central goal for Member States and the United Nations system. They had also recognized gender equality as a cross-cutting issue and agreed that the existing gender architecture was incoherent and under-resourced.

11. **Ms. Hannan** (Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women) introduced a number of reports before the Committee. The report on the Status of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/62/290) noted that ratification of the Convention had increased by 5 per cent since July 2005, to 185 States parties, and ratification of the Optional Protocol by 17 per cent to 88 States parties. Acceptances of the amendment to article 20.1 stood at 49, representing a 4 per cent increase. The report also recommended that the Assembly should approve the request of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for extension of its meeting time for 2008 and beyond. The Division for the Advancement of Women continued to provide technical assistance to States parties of the Convention upon request, including to countries emerging from conflict.

12. The report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, thirty-seventh, thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth sessions, was contained in document A/62/38. The Division for the Advancement of Women had benefited greatly from the expertise the members of that Committee had brought to the work of the United Nations on gender equality in New York and would continue to support the Committee in every way possible.

13. The report of the Secretary-General on future operations of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) (A/62/173) outlined activities undertaken by INSTRAW in the period 2006-2007, including in the areas of migration and development, women's political participation and governance and women, peace and security. It also highlighted collaboration with other entities.

14. The report of the Secretary-General on intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (A/62/201) highlighted the Secretary-General's commitment to a stronger and more visible role for the Organization in efforts to eliminate violence against women, concluding that entities of the United Nations system had stepped up their efforts in that regard.

15. The biennial report on violence against women migrant workers (A/62/177) analysed recent activities of Member States, including research, legal measures, policies, programmes and national strategies. It noted

efforts to ensure the safe repatriation of migrants and to regulate employment and migration and reported on activities undertaken in that regard by the United Nations system. It highlighted the need for gender-sensitive international migration policies that supported the empowerment of female migrants, as well as the need for further assessment of the effectiveness of measures to combat violence against female migrant workers.

16. The report on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/62/202) highlighted efforts to incorporate rural women in gender equality policies and strategies and rural development policies and programmes. It provided little information, however, on efforts to involve rural women in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such policies and programmes. The report identified a number of promising practices in increasing rural women's access to information and communication technology. It did not, however, include any reference to input from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the need to address the reproductive needs of rural women.

17. The report on measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/62/178) examined the extent to which intergovernmental bodies had paid attention to gender perspectives in their work and assessed the impact of the input of the Commission on the Status of Women to discussions within the United Nations system. At the Assembly's sixty-first session, gender perspectives had been more systematically integrated in outcomes dealing with social development and human rights, but had been less prominent in outcomes relating to economic and political issues. Although the Economic and Social Council had continued efforts to integrate gender perspectives into its work, there was a need for more systematic attention to gender perspectives by functional commissions, including through increased consultation with the Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission continued to play a catalytic role in advancing gender mainstreaming at all levels. The conclusions adopted at its fiftieth session had influenced policies and operational activities by increasing advocacy and awareness-raising activities and enhancing efforts to improve women's representation. The report recommended, inter alia, that the Secretary-General's reports should systematically include qualitative gender analysis, quantitative data and concrete recommendations to facilitate gender-sensitive policy development and that gender perspectives should be explicitly incorporated in implementation and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits.

18. **Ms. Sandler** (Ad Interim Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that the report on the activities of UNIFEM (A/62/188) highlighted practical actions in the four thematic areas that framed its current four-year plan — reducing feminized poverty and exclusion; promoting gender equality in democratic governance and post-conflict reconstruction; ending violence against women; and halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Three outcome-level results were used by UNIFEM to track its contributions to advancing national, regional and global initiatives for achieving gender equality. The first result area related to formulating and implementing gender equality plans, laws and policies. UNIFEM supported countries in strengthening their laws and policies and aligning them with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. An example was its support of the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs in its efforts to ensure that the National Plan of Action for Women's Advancement was fully incorporated into the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, Afghanistan's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

19. The second result area consisted of strengthening mainstream institutions to implement commitments to gender equality. Gender-responsive budgeting, increasingly used by countries, was perhaps the most concrete and practical tool in that regard. From 2004 to 2007, with support from many bilateral donors, UNIFEM had provided assistance in 41 countries, almost double the number during the previous four-year plan. The challenge lay in building sustainability into such initiatives and ensuring that they became central to larger development planning processes.

20. Another example of UNIFEM support to implementation involved developments related to the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, managed by UNIFEM on behalf of the United Nations system. Resolution 61/143 on intensification of efforts to eliminate violence against women called for strengthening the Trust Fund and for States to

increase their support, and progress had been made on both fronts. Contributions to the Trust Fund had grown nearly 300 per cent in the previous two biennia, and the United Nations Inter-Agency Programme Appraisal Committee of the Trust Fund was working to strengthen its grant making and evaluation processes.

21. Mainstream institutions were increasingly placing gender equality higher on their policy and programming agendas. However, political will alone did not translate into greater security, resources or rights, a fact best illustrated by the increasing use of rape as a weapon of war. Without an end to impunity for perpetrators, incentive systems that rewarded better responses to protect women from sexual abuse and partnerships that expanded resources and capacities, efforts would fall short of what was needed. Partnerships such as United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, made up of 12 United Nations organizations, represented progress, but more action was needed.

22. The third result area related to supporting the capacity of gender equality advocates to influence mainstream development. UNIFEM had provided support in 15 countries in 2006 to strengthen women's participation as voters, candidates and decision makers in elections, including in post-conflict countries. That work was fundamental to achieving the Millennium Development Goals but should move beyond a simple focus on numbers. It was estimated that it would take 50 years to reach parity throughout the world. Much more support and knowledge was needed to address the common constraints that women faced as candidates, including lack of resources, networks and in some cases basic security.

23. Based on the Fund's assessment of its current four-year plan and its work in the United Nations Development Group on mapping the work of United Nations Country Teams on gender equality, three key challenges continually emerged: replication and upscaling proven approaches, capacity development and partnerships and coordination. UNIFEM would continue to invest in critical efforts to allow it to work on both parts of its mandate, direct support to countries and mainstreaming gender equality in the United Nations system.

24. **Ms. Pérez Álvarez** (Cuba) asked what the thematic initiatives mentioned in paragraph 64 of the Secretary-General's report (A/62/201) were, and, with regard to paragraph 67, how the Task Force on Violence against Women would avoid duplicate efforts. Referring to the statement by the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, she expressed its concern at the fact that the activities of the new gender unit established by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) established a new unit for gender issues that might overlap with those of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Commission on the Status of Women.

25. During the summer of 2007, informal consultations had been organized on the report of the High-level Panel on system-wide coherence, and a number of delegations had emphasized the need to ensure that the system of intergovernmental consultations was maintained. On gender issues, a number of delegations, including her own, had emphasized the need to ensure compliance with the Beijing Platform for Action. Capacity-building programmes in developing countries must continue, and official development assistance must not be relegated to a second place.

26. She asked what could be done to avoid the elimination of specificities from United Nations work on gender and how the role of the Commission on the Status of Women could be strengthened.

27. **Mr. Bollavaram** (India) said that consensus existed within the United Nations system on a gender mainstreaming strategy. It was ironic that, in reports to the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General expressed concern at a lack of knowledge about operationalization of gender mainstreaming policies among senior managers of the United Nations. Another cause of concern was the distressingly slow rate at which gender parity was being achieved. The United Nations was a strategic partner to Member States, and it could not make a convincing moral argument if its own situation with regard to gender issues was not in order. He asked what specific measures were in place to address those two issues in the near future.

28. **Ms. Sulimani** (Sierra Leone) expressed appreciation for the support of the Division for the Advancement of Women in Sierra Leone helping build its capacity to comply with its reporting obligations under article 18 of the Convention. Sierra Leone had ratified the Convention in 1988, but a devastating

conflict had broken out immediately thereafter and had ended only five years earlier. As a result, it had not been able to submit its first five periodic reports until May 2007. The report had been commended by many as very comprehensive. Sierra Leone was fully committed to implementing the provisions of the Convention.

29. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) endorsed the comments made by the representative of India with regard to the United Nations as a model for gender equality, and requested further comment on the matter.

30. **Ms. Halabi** (Syrian Arab Republic) requested further information on how the issue of violence against women was being addressed in the occupied Palestinian territories and in all occupied territories, including the Golan Heights. She agreed with the representative of Cuba concerning the importance of implementing the outcomes of the Beijing Conference.

31. **Ms. Mayanja** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), replying to the representative of Cuba, said that more detailed information about the thematic initiatives referred to in paragraph 64 of the Secretary-General's report on violence against women (A/62/201) could be found in paragraphs 8 to 18 of the report.

32. With regard to paragraph 67 of the report, she said that the campaign to eliminate violence against women would be launched towards the end of 2007 by the Secretary-General himself, after which high-level officials throughout the United Nations system would act as advocates for the elimination of violence against women.

33. In response to the representative of India, she acknowledged that, even at the highest levels, understanding of gender mainstreaming could be improved. The Secretariat had been working very hard on United Nations-wide gender mainstreaming. Efforts continued to develop a system-wide action plan with clear indicators, a clear time framework and clear monitoring mechanisms; monitoring would be ensured by the CEB, making heads of entities accountable for gender mainstreaming in their respective areas of work. Work was also beginning on the development of a module for system-wide capacity training for gender mainstreaming.

34. Replying to the representatives of India and the Sudan, she said it was unacceptable that the numbers of women in high-level positions were either decreasing or, at best, static. Consultants were being commissioned to look into that issue. She hoped that a mechanism would be put in place very shortly to improve United Nations recruitment of women at senior levels, a goal that was of significant importance to the Secretary-General.

35. **Ms. Hannan** (Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women) said that the new gender unit in OHCHR would not replace or duplicate the work of the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) which would continue to ensure that women's human rights have a strong focus in the work of the United Nations in New York. She noted that a joint OHCHR/DAW work programme was prepared on an annual basis, precisely to avoid duplication and ensure collaboration and coordination. In that context the work of networks in the United Nations was critical.

36. While she agreed that it was important for Member States to think strategically about ways to strengthen the role of the Commission for the Status of Women, the recent changes in the Commission's methods of work had been positive. The Commission chose its priority themes in accordance with the broader agenda of the United Nations, systematically transmitted its outcomes to other parts of the United Nations, and had a strong focus on implementation at the national level. The high level of the Commission's participants was also an indication of the value placed on it.

37. In response to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, she referred to another project in the occupied Palestinian territories, a joint Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)/DAW workshop with countries of the region, as a follow-up to the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Violence against women was one of the issues to be addressed. She did not have further information on the particular initiative mentioned by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, but such information could be obtained.

38. **Ms. Sandler** (Ad Interim Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that UNIFEM had taken a number of initiatives for Palestinian women, including support to

women's centres, and programmes to provide them with livelihoods and to combat violence against women. With regard to progress in gender mainstreaming at the country level, there was a great deal of conceptual confusion among senior managers as to how it should be defined. Therefore, greater focus was planned on system-wide strategies and plans and expectations of senior managers and country teams in that area, including development of performance indicators. The resolutions on violence against women adopted at the sixty-first session had stimulated action and response at both the country and regional levels, although much remained to be done.

39. **Ms. Halabi** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that she would like to hear more about the global campaign on behalf of Palestinian women in the next report of the Secretary-General.

40. **Ms. Mayanja** (Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that the programme was in the process of being developed, and would be given more focus and prominence in future reports.

41. **Ms. Moreno** (Executive Director, United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)) said that the Executive Board of INSTRAW had approved a strategic framework for 2008-2011, a resource mobilization strategy and a workplan, thereby demonstrating that INSTRAW had become a matter of consensus rather than confrontation, and had returned to its position among gender institutions of the United Nations system. The Institute was undertaking research, capacity-building and knowledge management in the specific areas of the three pillars of the United Nations: development, peace and security and human rights.

42. In the area of development, the relevance of gender research in making women visible and improving their status had been proven. The impact of the INSTRAW initiative to include a gender perspective in the analysis of remittances had led to recognition in financial forums of women's important role in sending and managing remittances and their potential contribution to development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Research had been undertaken on global care chains between sending and receiving countries and on the functioning of new social structures in which transnational families were a growing phenomenon. Adjustments in gender roles in line with women's new economic responsibilities and persistent discrimination had also been analysed. In some cases, capacity-building activities aimed at improving the living conditions of women migrants would be initiated.

43. With regard to peace and security, women had the right to live without fear both within and outside their homes. The Institute had developed materials to contribute to the elimination of violence against women. The need to include a gender perspective in the reform of the security sector in compliance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) had led to the development of a virtual community, an inter-agency working group and an interactive Web page on gender training of peacekeeping personnel worldwide.

44. On the subject of human rights, there could be no true democracy without the political participation of women. An increasing number of women were candidates in national elections and some held positions of power, but discrimination persisted. Research undertaken by INSTRAW had shown that discrimination against women was stronger at the local level, which called for equal opportunity measures in local politics.

45. The greatest challenge facing the Institute continued to be financing on the basis of voluntary contributions, and she called on all Member States to contribute to its core budget, which would be supplemented through funds from the United Nations Foundation.

46. **Ms. Šimonović** (Chairperson, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) said that during 2007, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of its inaugural session. When it had taken place, in October 1982, there had been only 42 States parties to the Convention and only one annual two-week session, compared to the current 185 States parties and three sessions of three weeks each. Much had been achieved over those 25 years, including the adoption of the Optional Protocol in 1999, which had been ratified or acceded to by 88 States. Since its entry into force in December 2000, the Committee had taken action on 10 communications submitted by individuals and undertaken one inquiry under the Optional Protocol.

47. The past two years had been exceptionally productive due to the extended meeting time for the Committee approved by the General Assembly in December 2005, which had allowed the Committee to hold a constructive dialogue with over one third of the States parties over the two-year period. In each instance, the States parties concerned had received detailed guidance on steps to accelerate implementation of the Convention. She expressed appreciation for the efforts of national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to ensure that the Committee's concluding comments received the necessary follow-up. She drew attention to the Committee's report on the three sessions of 2007, contained in document A/62/38.

48. Significant progress had been made in reducing the backlog of reports awaiting consideration, but it had not yet been completely eliminated. The Committee had also stepped up its efforts to encourage States parties with long overdue reports to comply with their reporting obligations. Given its workload and its new responsibilities under the Optional Protocol, the Committee had therefore decided to submit to the General Assembly a request for an extension of meeting time to hold three annual sessions as a long-term measure, which would be equivalent to the meeting time of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee. It was also seeking authorization, as a temporary measure, to meet in parallel chambers for one of its annual sessions in 2008 and 2009, to ensure that the backlog was completely eliminated. The Committee was aware of the significant resource implications of its request, and appreciated the expressions of support it had already received. The support of all Member States would secure a sustainable framework for its future work and would be a further confirmation of the priority attached to the common commitment to eliminate discrimination against women and promote gender equality.

49. Over the past 25 years, the Committee had been supported by the Division for the Advancement of Women. Responsibility for its servicing would be transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as of 1 January 2008. The Committee looked forward to maintaining strong links with the Division in the future, or with any new structure that might be entrusted with the promotion of gender equality.

50. **Mr. Amil** (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly remained the guiding policy frameworks for gender equality and empowerment of women. Since its sixty-first session the General Assembly had paid specific attention to gender equality, including in the areas of violence against women, trafficking in women and girls, improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system and follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Elimination of discrimination and violence against women and girls and equal participation of women in social, cultural, economic and political life was an acknowledged prerequisite for sustainable development.

51. The Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women (A/61/122/Add.1 and Corr.1) had observed that as long as violence against women continued, it could not be claimed that real progress was being made towards equality, development and peace. The challenge was to surmount that highly complex and historically entrenched phenomenon. Poverty and social and economic upheaval exacerbated the risk of abuse and exploitation of women. The plight of women in rural areas, conflict situations, territories under foreign occupation, of migrant and trafficked women and of women and girls affected by unilateral coercive measures needed immediate attention. The Group of 77 and China was pleased to note that the Secretary-General was committed to a stronger and more visible role for the United Nations in that area and would soon launch a campaign to focus on advocacy, leadership and strengthened efforts at the regional and national levels.

52. Redressing a number of problems would remain crucial to efforts to eliminate violence against women and promote their economic, social and political advancement. First, women continued to suffer discrimination and exclusion in all societies, resulting from stereotypes and prejudice. Second, there was a clear linkage between underdevelopment and violence against women. The goals of development and poverty reduction could not be realized without the empowerment of women. Third, the plight of women in rural areas, conflict situations, territories under foreign occupation and of migrant and trafficked women must be addressed as a top priority. Fourth, advancement of

women was both a national and an international responsibility and could be achieved through cooperation in the context of globalization and the achievement of all internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

53. Central to the reduction of poverty among women was increasing their educational and training opportunities. Women's education decreased child mortality and improved the health of the family. It improved their chances for employment and therefore the welfare of the family in general. Women became more aware of their rights, and in turn increased their level of political participation. Education should serve as a vehicle for transforming attitudes, beliefs and entrenched social norms that perpetuated discrimination and inequality. The persistence of conflict in various parts of the world was another major impediment to the elimination of violence and sexual abuse of women. Special attention must be paid to the plight of women and their families living under foreign occupation to ensure that their basic rights were guaranteed.

54. All countries should take measures to address that challenge at the national level by bringing legislation in the area of gender discrimination into conformity with international human rights instruments. At the same time, international cooperation and partnership must be enhanced to assist countries in achieving that goal. For the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the international community must honour its commitment to official development assistance, debt relief and the opening of markets. By translating commitments into action, it was still possible to meet the challenge of eliminating violence against women.

55. **Ms. Mwaffisi** (United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that SADC was committed to addressing the priority needs of eradicating poverty and inequality among the people of the region. Gender equality and equitable participation of all people was not only a human right but imperative for economic growth, poverty eradication and overall human development. Accordingly, SADC had established gender policy frameworks, but there were disparities between policy and practice, coupled with technical, human and resource constraints and inadequate systems for monitoring, evaluation and timely reporting. SADC was in the final stages of developing a gender policy and protocol, which would be a guiding tool on improving synergies between national and regional structures and for gender mainstreaming.

56. Gender equality could not be achieved without addressing the improvement of the situation of rural women, who constituted the majority of the poor in the SADC region and were not fully involved in decision-making structures pertaining to their lives. SADC thus welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/62/202) and the recommendations it contained, and called for enhanced political commitment in implementing them.

57. SADC remained concerned at the increasing feminization of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. The proportion of women infected with HIV and at risk of malaria continued to increase, and malaria in pregnancy was a major cause for concern. Poverty, poor nutrition and underdevelopment increased women's vulnerability, and women in rural areas were most at risk. It therefore called on the international community to continue to support its efforts to increase access to prevention, treatment, care and support.

58. SADC welcomed the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women and the adoption of General Assembly resolution 61/143. It was fully committed to the eradication of all forms of violence against women and would report on its research in that area at the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. It recognized the efforts of the United Nations system, in particular the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, in the endeavour to eradicate all forms of violence against women. The Secretary-General's global campaign on violence against women was an important initiative.

59. SADC commended the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and would support its request to be provided, on a permanent basis, with three annual sessions of three weeks each, as well as the additional meeting time in parallel chambers on a temporary basis. The progress achieved by INSTRAW must be acknowledged and supported, and its work should be made more visible in all regions.

60. The Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly remained important for the

attainment of gender equality objectives and the advancement of women as well as the Millennium Development Goals. SADC was thus concerned that gender was integrated into only about one quarter of the outcomes of the General Assembly and was given greatest attention in outcomes dealing with social development and human rights, but received less attention in outcomes relating to economic and political issues. Gender was a cross-cutting issue that should be mainstreamed throughout the United Nations system. In addition to the recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General in his report (A/62/178), she urged that measures for accountability for gender mainstreaming should be instituted in the United Nations system.

61. SADC had made tremendous efforts towards the achievement of gender equality and the advancement of women due to the political commitment and effort of its member States coupled with the support of its international partners. Many challenges remained, and she appealed for the continued support of the international community.

61. **Ms. Pérez Alvarez** (Cuba) said that attaining the Millennium Development Goals was by no means assured and the information provided on the status of their implementation did not give much reason for optimism. That was particularly true of the situation of women and girls, who continued to make up a majority of the poor. Gender inequity in employment, job security, salaries and access to education was contributing to the feminization of poverty. The International Labour Organization (ILO) had reported that more women than ever were unemployed or employed in low-productivity sectors, or received lower wages than men for doing the same work. Women also suffered the impacts of death in childbirth, HIV/AIDS and illiteracy.

62. Since the Revolution, her Government had been developing policies on gender equity. Cuba had been the first country to sign and the second to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. National laws and programmes recognized the fundamental productive and reproductive roles of women, and systematic efforts aimed at eliminating discriminatory stereotypes. Since 1960, employment of women had increased sevenfold, and women currently made up significant proportions of the technical, professional and managerial work forces. Cuba was one of the top ten countries worldwide in the number of female parliamentarians, with 36 per cent of seats held by women, thanks to a strategy of consciousness-raising in the community and among women in particular.

63. Cuba recognized the importance of domestic labour, and women received salaries while caring for the disabled, ill children or adolescents and the elderly. Her Government's commitment to gender equality was being realized through programmes that guaranteed free universal access to health care, education, employment and social security.

64. All those efforts took place in spite of the economic, commercial and financial blockade that had been imposed on Cuba for almost half a century by the United States Government. That hostile policy had included support for terrorist acts against Cubans. Five Cuban anti-terrorism fighters remained illegally detained in American territory since 1998. Two of their spouses had been denied visas to visit them, in breach of international instruments and United States law.

65. Until the international community applied policies driven by international cooperation and human solidarity to put an end to gender inequities and the unequal distribution of wealth, the rights of women and girls would remain in jeopardy.

66. **Ms. Smit** (Netherlands) said that education was the key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, empowering women and giving them economic and social independence: by 2015, all girls must be in school, so that they could develop their full potential in a safe environment.

67. In the Netherlands, more than one half of university students were women and more women were graduating. Nevertheless, gender inequalities still existed in the labour force, where women were underrepresented in technical professions and held too few managerial positions and corporate directorships. Barriers to women's equal employment were an impediment to economic prosperity.

68. To help girls throughout the world develop their talents, the international community should give priority to a number of actions: making education neutral, so that boys and girls had the same opportunities; ensuring gender balance among teachers, who acted as role models; providing sex and gender education as a basis for healthy relationships at home

and at work; persuading parents that their daughters must finish school and encouraging girls to do so; and providing appropriate sanitary facilities in schools so that girls would feel safe and welcome there.

69. Governments must make better use of the know-how and networks of non-governmental organizations and United Nations funds and programmes in order to help young people everywhere achieve independence and prosperity.

70. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) said that the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 had signalled a global commitment to the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality. The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000 had also represented major progress in putting those goals firmly on the international agenda. The high expectations thus set nevertheless remained unmet, despite the improvements detailed in the report of the Secretary-General on measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to the implementation of those outcomes (A/62/178). More efforts by Member States and all mechanisms for women were therefore needed to accomplish the objectives of improving the status of women, protecting women's rights and widening the opportunities for women's participation in all activities.

71. Women in the Sudan had enjoyed full civil and political rights since the 1960s. The first woman parliamentarian, for instance, had taken her seat in 1965 and many others had since followed suit. Women also held senior positions in the judicial and executive branches of both federal and state government, as well as in the civil service. Legislation and laws had moreover been introduced to further strengthen the position of women on the basis of a heritage of beliefs, values and customs that safeguarded their status and emphasized their role in public life. Indeed, women's equal rights with men had always been affirmed in the Constitutions of the Sudan. The relevant national institutions and authorities were now also embarked on implementing a national policy for the empowerment of women, focusing on core areas for improvement identified with the aid of relevant statistics on the status of women.

72. Further gains for women in their role as genuine partners in all walks of life would, however, be achieved only through enhanced international coordination and cooperation, technical assistance and national capacity-building aimed at ensuring fulfilment of the commitments made for the empowerment and advancement of women. On a closing note, he urged immediate United Nations action that would not only end the daily tragedy of Palestinian women suffering under the Israeli occupation and embargo but also guarantee their right to a decent life of freedom in an independent homeland.

73. **Ms. Kurosaki** (Japan) said that progress for women was progress for all, a principle that was crucial to achieving internationally agreed development goals. Her Government recognized the importance of engaging in activities to create gender equity domestically, regionally and internationally. Its national plan for gender equality called for the proportion of women in leadership positions to increase to some 30 per cent by 2020. More women had been elected to parliament during the last elections. Approximately $39 billion of the national budget went to the promotion of gender equality.

74. In Japan, as elsewhere, women struggled to strike a good work-life balance and contended with a gender-based division of labour. While the proportion of women newly recruited to the workforce was growing, the number of women employed in corporate management remained low. Employment for women was especially low during their childbearing years; her Government had therefore raised its target for the number of men taking parental leave and had amended the law to prohibit lay-offs for reasons such as pregnancy and childbirth.

75. In 2007, Japan had co-sponsored a two-day symposium of gender experts that had resulted in a series of recommendations on how the Association of Southeast Asia Nations Plus China, Japan and the Republic of Korea could work to alleviate the feminization of poverty. A second symposium had highlighted the importance of incorporating the care economy, with gender perspectives, into each country's economic and development aid policies.

76. Regional dialogues were effective ways of sharing information and good practices in gender mainstreaming within similar social and cultural contexts. They also helped forge collective regional responses to emerging gender-related problems such as human trafficking, HIV/AIDS and natural disasters.

77. Because gender equality and women's empowerment were cross-cutting issues, coordination and strategic partnerships within the United Nations system were critical. The High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence had called the current gender structure fragmented and incoherent. Her delegation stood ready to help the United Nations redress that situation.

78. **Mr. Islam** (Bangladesh) said that integrating a gender perspective into the new vision of development was crucial to ensuring equal rights for women. Greater synergies should be developed between the Millennium Development Goals, the Beijing Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as a means of achieving all other development goals.

79. His Government had been at the forefront of endeavours to establish gender equality and empower women. Bangladesh was a party to almost all major international instruments in that area and was playing a pioneering role regionally through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). A national policy and action plan had been put in place, together with a monitoring and evaluation mechanism. Women's voices were being heard through consultations during preparation of the country report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

80. Domestically inspired ideas such as access to microcredit and non-formal education were emancipating women economically. Women's employment was increasing steadily in the garment and leather industries and in the non-formal labour sector. International cooperation through financial and technical assistance as well as through trade would further improve the situation.

81. In the political arena, 45 seats in parliament were reserved for women, who could also contest direct elections. New legislation had resulted in 13,000 women being elected to local governments. Women held prominent positions in all professions, including as decision makers.

82. In education, Bangladesh had overcome an enormous gender gap over the previous decade and a half to achieve 100 per cent parity in primary and secondary enrolments by the end of 2006. Girls received a free education up to grade 11. In other areas, Bangladesh had worked on incorporating a gender perspective into its poverty-reduction strategies, and had enacted legislation to protect women and girls from violence.

83. As one of the largest troop contributors for peacekeeping and one of the sponsors of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, Bangladesh felt that the Peacebuilding Commission should implement that resolution fully in conflict resolution, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation.

84. Despite the many achievements and the bridging of the gender gap in schooling, social inequities and injustice against women persisted. There was also a major poverty gap: women and girls were still the most vulnerable group in Bangladesh. International resources must be mobilized to help win what was an uphill battle. The United Nations was doing its best under the mandates entrusted to it; the developed world, for its part, should be lending more material support.

85. **Mr. Guo** Jiakun (China) said that there was broad consensus in the international community that women should be empowered, their rights and interests should be safeguarded and gender equality should be established. His delegation appreciated the increasing attention given to gender equality by inter-governmental organizations and supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that the concept of gender equality should be incorporated into the implementation and follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits.

86. His Government also supported the efforts, reviewed in the Secretary-General's report (A/62/202), to improve protection of the rights and interests of rural women. Such efforts would help eradicate poverty, improve education and extend health service to rural women.

87. In order to fulfil China's commitment under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a national programme had been established for 2001-2010. A recent midterm assessment showed that most of its main objectives had been met ahead of schedule, including in women's employment, attendance of girls in middle school, average life expectancy of women and safe drinking water. Governments at all levels had incorporated women's development into their planning, the relevant regulations were being strengthened and data collection and monitoring had begun taking gender-related indicators into account. A training

course on gender budgeting had been held in August 2007 to explore ways to incorporate gender awareness into national budgeting.

88. His Government was prepared to work with the international community to promote implementation of the Beijing Declaration and, on the basis of China's specific conditions, advance the cause of safeguarding the rights and interests of Chinese women.

89. **Ms. Banzon** (Philippines) said that the political, social and economic changes under way worldwide had reinforced stereotypes, leading to a perilous mixture of gender bias and discrimination based on class, age, race, ethnicity and faith. Migrant women were most vulnerable to that discriminatory environment, and therefore their protection was both a human rights and a development issue. Her delegation would once again be introducing a draft resolution on violence against women migrant workers calling for human rights-based and gender-sensitive labour and migration policies and better cooperation among all stakeholders.

90. In 2008, the Philippines would hold an international event focusing on migrant women and human rights, which would in turn inform the second Global Forum on Migration and Development to be hosted by the Philippines later in the year. The Forum would not only examine a range of issues in the protection of migrant women workers' rights but would also highlight areas such as good practices on reintegration, the use of remittances and financial literacy training.

91. Women could play an important role in peacemaking and reconciliation. To fulfil that potential, however, they had to live in an environment that included proper health care and education and in which their opinions were heard and respected. Moreover, there was a direct correlation between democracy and women's empowerment. The more democratic a political system was, the more opportunities there were for women to participate in leadership, decision-making and nation-building.

92. With respect to the gender architecture in the United Nations, her delegation was in favour of a restructuring that would enhance the effectiveness and coherence of the Organization's work on gender. Three aspects were particularly important: first, the work of the new gender entity should be genuinely demand-driven and based on an intersection of national priorities and international standards. Secondly, the entity must have the profile and stature to engage in important decision-making. Lastly, it must be adequately funded and funds must be channelled to respond to the gender priorities identified by countries in need.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.